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ABSTRACT

The name of Ezra Christian Buehler deserves to be added to the list of significant contributors to speech communication education. As an instructor at the University of Kansas, Professor Buehler has distinguished himself through his contributions to basic speech students, graduate students in speech education, and his colleagues. He expressed his belief in the discipline of speech and in speech students in a 1960 essay entitled "Credo--A Declaration of Faith Concerning Speech Education," and in his book, "Speech: A First Course." And he has practiced three basic principles he himself advanced for teachers of the basic speech course: (1) know the students, (2) motivate them, and (3) maintain a congenial classroom. Further showing his dedication to the basic speech course and his desire to recognize and encourage outstanding teachers, Buehler was instrumental in establishing a teaching award for first-year basic speech teachers. Buehler also organized the "Conference of Directors of Basic Speech Courses of Midwestern Universities. Intended as a single meeting in 1961, the conference has agreed unanimously to meet every year since. The learning he encouraged at that first conference has spread to a second and third generation of course directors. (HTH)

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CONTRIBUTIONS OF E. C. BUEHLER TO THE BASIC SPEECH COURSE

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INTRODUCTION

William Norwood Brigance, Alan H. Monroe, J. Jeffery Auer, Elwood Murray, Franklin Knower and Robert T. Oliver, were only a few of the men listed by Professor E. C. Buehler as significant contributors to the "field of speech," when as a first year graduate student I listened and took notes in "Prof's" "History of Speech Education" course. What I did not realize then, but do now, was that at least one person, who had made significant contributions to the "field of speech," was not on "Prof's" list of "Greats." I am sure that the name of the person I have in mind had never occurred to Ezra Christian "Prof" Buehler.

PURPOSE

I am not here today to delete any of the names from Professor Buehler's list. I am here today to add the name, Professor Ezra Christian Buehler, to that list of those who have made significant personal and professional contributions to the "field of speech." The "field of speech" is a broad one: Professor Buehler's contributions have been broad. I should like to focus upon Professor Buehler's personal and professional contributions in the area often called "the basic speech course."

The "basic speech course" became a requirement for all College of Liberal Arts and Science graduates at the University of Kansas in 1945. From that time, through the latter part of his teaching career, and still today, Professor Buehler has distinguished himself through his contributions:

1) to the students he has personally instructed in the basic course, 2) to the graduate students he has instructed in philosophy and methods of teaching the basic course, and 3) to his colleagues in the midwest (and throughout the U.S.) who have served as directors of the basic course.

Contributions to Basic Course Speech Students

Professor Buehler's contributions to the basic course student are seen in the effect he had upon beginning course students, in his philosophy regarding speech and speech students, and through his writings related to the basic course.

In an interview on March 1, 1983, I asked Professor Buehler what he felt accounted for his influence on basic speech course students. His reply:

"That's difficult to answer, but the feedback I get (from students) tells me I did something to help students in self-discovery and self renewal that overshadowed the processes of pure knowledge -- something for the inner man. I did something primarily in the area of the beginning course where there was a common feeling of being inadequate and students had feelings of anxiety and students said, 'What can I do? I'm nobody.'"[1]

Numerous unsolicited letters from former students support his influence and help. One such letter arrived one day from Peru, South America. It said simply, "Dear Professor Buehler, You won't remember me but you did so much for me. Thank you."[2]

To raise a single student's estimate of his/her own worth--to be directly responsible for an increase in just one student's self-esteem is an accomplishment. When that effect is magnified over the thousands of students affected

in over forty-six years of teaching, the effect and the contribution to them all is of enormous consequence.

Professor Buehler has said he was a "missionary without a Bible or a religion"[3] in describing his fervor in developing self-confidence in his students.

This philosophy is seen in his writings regarding the student in the basic course. Professor Buehler, once in an oft-hand manner, assigned his graduate class of beginning teachers of the basic course to "work up a noble rationale of the role of basic speech training in life and living."[4] When he called for the classes' presentations of their rationales--no one had done the assignment--neither had he.[5]

Fulfilling his own assignment, Professor Buehler wrote his "Credo-A Declaration of Faith Concerning Speech Education" which later appeared as a lead article in The Speech Teacher in 1960. While abstracted below, the "Credo," expresses the ideas and philosophies of this "missionary without a Bible or a religion" which encouraged student confidence and growth.

In the "Credo," Professor Buehler expresses his beliefs in speech and speech students.

"I believe that of all human functions the gift of speech is most miraculous." . . . "that the ability to be articulate is essential to inner harmony, to emotional maturity and mental balance." . . . "that speech is essential to the growth of the human personality and that it provides a way for self-discovery and self-renewal." . . . "What one is, is always part of what one says. I believe that there is no substitute for content in the speaking process. Material of intellectual worth provides the essence of eloquence."[6]. . . "I believe you should make self-reliance your cardinal

virtue." . . . "Rely upon your own ability." . . . "You will have to think for yourself, speak for yourself and act for yourself in real life. Why not cultivate the habit in your speech class?"[7] "I believe that every student should develop a concern for truthful and responsible speech. . ." "I believe speech offers a lifetime of challenge in which there is never a final summit of achievement beyond which one cannot climb." "I believe the individuality of the speaker is an asset in the speaking process. . . . Every student has the potential to speak superbly at some time."[8]

These beliefs, written for the basis speech course student, embody the significance and importance generally attributed today to the process of human communication.

Professor Buehler's classroom attitude and dealings with students were true to these beliefs. These beliefs in the importance of speech and the worth of students are clearly set forth in his book, (co-authored with Wil Linkugel), originally titled Speech: A First Course[9], now in its third edition. Thus, through his writings, his thoughts affected not only the basic course students who studied his ideas but those who taught the basic course using his textbooks.[10]

Contributions To Basic Course Teachers

"Professor Buehler realized that teaching the Basic Course was no easy task. To begin with, the beginning speech classes at KU (The University of Kansas) were required courses. Because of this, Buehler felt that students often entered his classes with some dread and apprehension. Due to the personal nature of the course, these feelings could impede the spirit and motivation necessary to create a productive atmosphere."[11]

His insight into the complexity and difficulty of teaching the basic course is seen in his statement: "In the Basic Course, one is challenged to engage the entire self with others. You almost have to be a psychologist to teach this; to spark growth. Attitude of the speaker, the inner self, is the key . . . teaching the person, rather than the subject. If you can teach the person, he'll find a way to teach himself."[12]

Professor Buehler expressed three basic principles for teachers of the basic course: 1) Know your students, 2) Motivate your students, and 3) Maintain a congenial classroom.[13]

What one learned as a student preparing to be a speech teacher under Professor Buehler was one more of attitude, philosophy, and approach than a specific methodology of how to teach the course.

There is no doubt that Professor Buehler believed that the teacher was the most important ingredient to the success of the basic course. This idea was relentlessly communicated to potential teachers in "Prof's" classroom and is evident in his "Credo" when he speaks to the teacher of the basic course. A truncated version of the "Credo" to speech teachers, which I hope captures the zeal of the original, follows:

"I believe you as a speech teacher must deal with people rather than mere theory and principle. I believe you must teach with your heart and soul as well as your head." . . . "(That) you should enjoy teaching speech, and if the venture is boring, you should seek other occupations." . . . "(That) you should plan and prepare and be completely tuned up mentally and emotionally for every class session." . . . "(That) each student individually

should be challenged to develop his own capacity to the fullest and that he should compete with himself rather than for grades." . . . "(That) through your classroom craftsmanship you must create a suitable environment by which the student's speaking experience is most rewarding." . . . "All criticism should be constructive, should fit the individual speaker, and the specific goals of the assignment." . . . (That)"the academic strength of the course should lie essentially in the day to day quality of the speeches rather than crammed knowledge of text theories." . . . (That) "Students should like and respect you, but if there must be a choice between the two, heaven forbid, choose the latter. Be their master--the kind that leads, not commands."[14]

Neither beginning course students nor graduate students ever had to choose between like and respect for Professor Buehler. The respect for the man, the influence of his respect for his students, the basic course, and prospective teachers, continues to reverberate throughout America in basic speech courses and in teachers of the basic course.

Further showing his dedication to the basic course and his desire to recognize and encourage outstanding teachers, Professor Buehler was instrumental in establishing a teaching award which has been given each year since 1961-1962 to the most outstanding teacher(s) in their first year of college teaching in the basic course(s) at the University of Kansas.

The coveted award carries a nominal cash award, a raise in salary for the recipient(s), but is coveted most for the honor of being recognized as an E.C. Buehler Teaching Award recipient.

Beginning this year, 1983, Professor Buehler, in his continuing tradition to foster outstanding classroom teaching has established a supplemental

teaching fellowship to be awarded to first year or returning University of Kansas graduate students who have demonstrated excellence in the classroom and dedication to fostering and developing the ideals of student growth and self-confidence. "Prof's" generous gift has enabled the Department to establish these fellowships which we choose to call, E.C. Buehler Teaching Fellowships.

Contributions To Directors Of The Basic Speech Course

It was his idea, that which many of you will perhaps recognize as an institution, "The Conference of Directors of the Basic Speech Course of Midwestern Universities." The year was 1961, and as Professor Buehler used to tell us when he talked about William Jennings Bryant, "I was there Charlie." Well, I was there, but let's let "Prof" tell how the "Basic Course Conference" got started.

"Fundamentals of Speech. The basic course was my great concern the latter half of my teaching career." . . .

"While Moses never got his show on the road until he was past 80, I was past 65 when I dreamed up this Midwest Conference. For many years, I felt that within our profession of speech teachers the greatest sins of omission were committed in the area of the basic course. Here we have too many of our poorest teachers and too few of our best. Upper-level teachers tend to look down on teaching this course as an unpleasant chore. Students object to the course because it is required. This is a threat to their self-image and self-confidence. For most students, this is their first and last speech course. In many instances, twice as many students enroll in this course than all the courses combined in the department.

For the last half of my time in service, I felt the regional and national speech conventions offered little help to the basic course teachers. I wanted a small, peer group to have brainstorming meetings without formal academic papers and freedom to pool their ideas and mutually help each other to be better teachers of the beginning course.

Finally, in June 1961, I caught a vision, triggered partly by a new organization called Mid-America State Universities Association. This was formed to improve quality of education at lower cost. This relates to six states with the Big Eight schools plus Colorado State and the University of Iowa. But I had two hurdles to overcome. I had to get the green light from the executive council of the six-state organization and the University of Kansas. After I got the 'go' sign from both, I wrote to the chairpersons of ten schools. The response was one hundred percent favorable.

There was no thought about annual meetings. But the first venture came off in grand style. The group voted unanimously to continue by accepting the invitation by Loren Reid to come to the University of Missouri. At that time I thought this was a miracle. I feel so now, more than ever. Jan Timmons, who acted as reporter for our meetings at K.U., wrote me a letter before Christmas saying that this first Mid-West Basic Course Conference made so much sense, she wondered why in heck someone didn't think of this sooner."[15]

Jan Timmons, first-year graduate student at the University of Kansas, did a faithful job of recording those in formal attendance at the conference, the titles of their presentations and a remarkable summary of their remarks. What she did not record, because it was unimportant at the time, and perhaps still is, is that "I was there, Charlie."

Jan Timmons, I and approximately ten to twelve graduate students were at that time enrolled in Professor Buehler's course, "Seminar in Teaching the Beginning Course in Speech." Professor Buehler invited the class to drop by the "Conference" on Friday, February 16, 1962. I, and most of the class, did.

The following week Professor Buehler distributed the "minutes" or Jan Timmons' "REPORT ON THE FIRST CONFERENCE OF DIRECTORS OF THE BEGINNING COLLEGE COURSE OF THE MIDWEST STATE UNIVERSITIES ASSOCIATION, LAWRENCE, KANSAS-FEB. 16-17-1962". The "Report" is a six-page single spaced document. What is amazing to me about the "Report" is that I kept my copy of it since 1962. But, what will amaze you is that I am going to read it to you right now. Come back! Actually, all I want to do is point out some points of interest in the "Report." The "Conference" as you may know came of age this year when it was held for the twenty-first consecutive year.

The first "Conference" was opened at the home of Professor E.C. Buehler. Representatives from ten schools were invited, the universities of the Big Eight Conference, Oklahoma, Colorado, Missouri, Kansas State, Iowa State, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma State, and the State Universities of Iowa and Colorado. These were the schools represented by the then newly formed Midwest State Universities Association. Oklahoma and Iowa State were unable to attend due to prior commitments.

Professor Buehler, in his opening remarks, expressed his pleasure at the whole hearted enthusiastic response for the Conference by the schools in the Association. Professor Buehler pointed out the purpose of the conference was "to provide a learning experience for the directors of speech fundamentals programs rather than legislative action."[16]

In stating that clear purpose for the Conference, Professor Buehler established the direction of learning that still persists twenty-one years later. One year, some years later, a Conference director attempted to introduce the goal of legislative action for the Conference. The program had been pre-structured such that action caucuses were supposed to meet in separate rooms and develop action plans for submitting to the Speech Association of America. The idea was met with hostility, resentment and ultimately rejection. Most did not attend those sessions but instead met at night and continued the learning objective of the original Conference.

That first conference had thirteen people in attendance plus the secretary and a guest speaker. The conference has grown, many schools have been included beyond the original Midwest Association, but the purpose and the procedures remain the same. The Conference attendance is held to a number small enough so that everyone is in the same room for the entire two--two and one half days. Everyone hears everything that is said. Problems are discussed openly without fear of exposure, but rather in the spirit of helping others and learning what has been done in other schools. It is a working Conference. It is a conference, and I agree, where I have heard this basic comment from every participant: "This is the best Conference I have ever been to--it's better than SCA, ICA, or any regional meeting. When I come here I learn something."

Professor Buehler's contribution to directors of the basic course has been magnified far more than simply the twenty-one years of the conference times the number of participants. The learning that he encouraged has spread to the second and third generations of course directors. I and all of the directors of the basic course who have ever attended this conference express our appreciation for his vision and farsightedness.

The close of the conference that first year consisted of a brief business meeting. At "this meeting the group voted unanimously to have another meeting in February of 1963."[17]

The vote has been unanimous for 21 years. This year, 1983, the conference was hosted by the University of Iowa--in February.

I asked Professor Buehler recently what he thought of the fact that the basic course conference just had its 21st birthday when it originally was conceived of as a one-time meeting. His answer:

"What surprised me the most was the attitude of acceptance--it took root. My idea was to have it for one year . . . it got started and other schools wanted in. I think it helped awaken an interest and a realization of the basic course in the context of higher education."[18]

CONCLUSION

Indeed it did, "Prof," and indeed you did awaken a realization of the importance of the basic speech course in your students and teachers and directors of the basic course. Given these and all your numerous contributions, it is not necessary for anyone to add your name to this or any other list of "Greats" in the "field of speech." You are now, and long ago were, at the top of the list of "Greats" with your past students, teachers of the basic course, and course directors.

Let me, for them and myself, say: "Dear Prof, you may not remember us, but we remember you and all you did for us. Thank you very much!"

ENDNOTES

[1] Interview with Professor Buehler, March 1, 1983

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] "Credo - a Declaration of Faith Concerning Speech Education." Taken from a one page printed hand-out signed E.C.B., distributed by E.C. Buehler following his address to the Conference of Directors of the Basic Speech Course of Midwestern Universities, Lawrence, Kansas, February 1978. This is an edited version of the "Credo...." which originally appeared in The Speech Teacher, Vol. XII, Autumn 1960, pp. 4-5.

[7] E.C. Buehler, "Credo - A Declaration of Faith Concerning Speech Education", The Speech Teacher, Vol. XII, Autumn 1960, pp. 4-5.

[8] "Credo - a Declaration...."

[9] E.C. Buehler and Wil A. Linkugel, Speech: A First Course, Harper and Row, Publishers (New York), 1962. The second edition was titled Speech Communication A First Course 1969, and the third edition was published, Wil A. Linkugel and E. Christian Buehler, Speech Communication for the Contemporary Student, Harper and Row, Publishers, (New York), 1975.

[10] Professor Buehler once told this writer that he argued "long and hard" with the publisher against the title Speech: A First Course. Considering the book's acceptance by teachers in the field and Professor Buehler's long "love affair" with the first course, the title, perhaps in retrospect, seems well chosen.

[11] Sally Shaw Hood, As Yet Untitled Masters Thesis on the Life and Professional Contributions of E.C. Buehler. Masters Thesis in progress, The University of Kansas, Chapter III, no page numbers given.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] E.C. Buehler, "Credo....", The Speech Teacher, p. 5.

[15] Ezra Christian Buehler: His Life and Professional Ideas, Clare Novak and Marilyn Conboy (Eds.), Kansas Speech Communication Society, The University of Kansas (Lawrence, Kansas) 1982, pp. 95-96.

[16]Report on the First Conference of Directors of the Beginning College Speech Course of the Midwest Universities Association, Lawrence, Kansas, Feb. 16-17, 1962, p. 1.

[17]Ibid. p. 6.

[18]Interview with Professor Buehler, March 1, 1983.